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Cause of Jan. 16 Danvers Fatal Fire: Electrical

State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan and the Danvers Fire and Police Departments announced that the most probable cause of the fatal fire on January 16, 2008 at 30 Lawrence Street, Danvers was an electrical malfunction. The fire took the life of a man and woman who were found on the second floor overcome by smoke.

Coan said, "In 2004, 2005, and 2006 we experienced all-time record low numbers of fire deaths, but in 2007 deaths jumped dramatically. In fact, December 2007 was the deadliest December for fires in a decade." He added, "Nobody plans to have a fire, but when one occurs, seconds count. I cannot stress enough the importance of making sure your smoke alarms are working and of making and actually practicing a home fire escape plan."

Danvers Fire Chief James Tutko said, "It is sad to lose two of our residents to fire after having no loss of life during the horrific Danversport explosion of 2006." The victims, Olga and Andrezej Pierowski, were positively identified through dental records by the Medical Examiner's Office. The cause of death for both victims was due to smoke inhalation and foul play is not suspected.

First arriving firefighters did not hear any smoke alarms sounding and the one smoke alarm found in the basement had no battery. Tutko added, "The evidence suggests that there were no working smoke or carbon monoxide alarms in this home. This terrible tragedy might well have been prevented if the house was properly equipped by smoke and carbon monoxide alarms."

Fire investigators determined that the area of origin was between the basement ceiling and the floor of the first floor. The only heat source in this area was electrical wiring that showed signs of having malfunctioned.

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The fire was jointly investigated by members of the Danvers Fire Department, Danvers Police Department detectives, and state police assigned to the Office of the State Fire Marshal. State police assigned to the Essex District Attorney's Office were also involved in the investigation.

Watch For Warning Signs

Coan said, "This is the second fatal fire so far this year in our state from an electrical malfunction. People should watch for warning signs of electrical problems. These include:

- ◆ Fuses blowing or circuit breakers tripping frequently.
- ◆ Unusually warm or faulty outlets or switches.
- ◆ A vague smell of something burning.
- ◆ A sizzling sound in the wall."

Any of these signs may indicate a potential problem. Contact a licensed electrician if you notice any of these signs. Fuses and circuit breakers are safety devices. They blow or trip when the amount of current cannot safely travel through the wires. *Trying to bypass the fuse or circuit breaker protection is an invitation to danger.*

Electrical Systems Pose Unseen Dangers

Just as all systems need maintenance and inspection, so does electrical wiring. As switches, receptacles and connections age, heat is generated and the risk of fires inside walls and at poor connections greatly increases. Because wiring is often hidden behind walls, electrical faults may be hard to detect except by properly trained electricians.

Have Electrical Systems Examined by a Licensed Electrician Every 10 Years

Have electrical systems examined by a licensed electrician every 10 years. A good electrician will look for electrical faults, check for warm switch plates and receptacles, and analyze the use of electricity to see if additional capacity is needed. It is important to help our homes keep up with the electrical demands of our changing lifestyles, changes in society and new technologies.